

# Arthritis and Joint Pain in Cats

March 12, 2013

"One day, I noticed Callie was "gimpy", walking with a catch in her getalong, not jumping on the counter to get water from the sink or up on the bed to sleep with me," said [stephaniex](#).

Dr. Cindy Houlihan owner of [The Cat Practice](#) in Birmingham, Michigan, says, "A cat should have a gliding walk, like a runway model. When you see a mincing walk that says ouch, ouch, ouch with every step, it's time for a checkup for pain related to arthritis."

Changes in movement or behavior can be the first signs of discomfort. Cats are stoic about pain so their people have to look for clues like loss of appetite or range of motion, and a more withdrawn personality.

[LDG](#) posted "The vet explained that most people just chalk up lower activity to aging. In many instances, arthritis is discovered quite accidentally, before there are serious signs of mobility problems." Her cat, Flowerbell, had an x-ray for an unrelated problem. It showed that Flowerbell's hip joints were just about gone.

## Symptoms of Feline Arthritis

Fewer jumps, a stiff walk, change in litter box habits, constipation, creaking or cracking noises from the elbow/knee joints, less playtime, less social, poor grooming.

"Assuming the position" while in the litter box puts a lot of stress on the spine and the back legs as your cat tries to balance. Cats have the ability to decide not to use the box - and that leads to constipation. They may also go near, but not in the box.

Grooming is a problem for arthritic cats because they can't twist, turn and do leg lifts like they used to. A soft bristled brush or comb can remove excess hair without causing pain.

A cat's body is parallel to the ground so every step can hurt not only the back but all joints - shoulders, knees, elbows, ankles and neck. He'll spend less time with family and avoid other cats when they play, just to keep out of the way and to avoid getting bumped.

## Treating Arthritis in Cats

"Glucosamine is well-tolerated by most cats," says Dr. Houlihan. "It can be given in powder form to mix with food, as a capsule or a treat." Dr. Jessica Stern of [Cats Exclusive Veterinary Clinic](#) in Seattle, Washington, says, "Steroids bring their own side effects like kidney or liver problems so they should be used sparingly. A low dose that is carefully monitored can give your cat relief for the short term. Also consider acupuncture and laser pulsing to give cats improved mobility. After all, both are used in sports medicine for joint injuries."

[Skippymjp](#) posts, "Dr. Cathy's first suggestion was Cosequin, which seemed to work quite well. I have a photo of Turvy on top of a kitchen cabinet a couple months after starting on treatment."

## Prevention of Feline Arthritis

"About 70-90% of the older cats we see have arthritis to some degree. We need to see the signs and act on them. There are things you can do too, that will help your cat as he ages," says Dr. Stern.

- Keep your cat's weight under control. Extra pounds put extra pressure on joints.
- Exercise - at least at a low level.
- Massage - who doesn't benefit from a nice rubdown?
- Fatty Acids in the diet - use true fish oils, not flaxseed or other plant-based oils.

## Making Life Easier

[Nebula](#) posted, "We always have a heating pad, on the lowest setting, in Smokie's favorite chair. He loves the warmth."

Steps to the bed, sink or windows - [Momofmany](#) posted about her late cat, Stumpy. "We added step stools to key areas in the house (our bed and the food bowl) so that he could climb up on things." She also made a hammock for Stumpy, from PVC pipe and fabric slings anchored on all four sides for stability but flexible enough not to add more stress to aching pressure points. "One day I figured out if I kept stacking hammocks up taller and taller, Stumpy could stair step up to the top, and still have a comfortable place to sleep."

Elevate and Lower - Raise food and water dishes so your cat doesn't have to bend his neck or crouch to eat. Lower the height of the litter box - stepping in can cause pain if the sides are too high. Have multiple litter boxes and water dishes. If he doesn't feel like taking the stairs, he'll still have access.

## Most of All

Don't ignore early symptoms of arthritis. Lubricate the joints with glucosamine, add fish oil or find a combination of remedies that work for your cat - there will be less damage later.



Arthritic cat Stumpy is on the second tier from the top  
Picture by Momofmany



Arthritic cat Turvy Demeter is on the top shelf  
Picture by Skippymjp